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# Player Perceptions Of The Talent Development Environment In Elite English Youth Soccer Academies

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# Introduction

**Talent Development Environments (TDEs) are resource intensive requiring substantial financial investment.**

Martindale, R. J. J., Collins, D., & Daubney, J. (2005). Talent development: A guide for practice and research within sport. *QUEST*, 57, 353–375.  
doi:10.1080/00336297.2005.10491862

**TDEs in English soccer have been a focus of increasing research attention.**

Gledhill, A., Harwood, C., & Forsdyke, D. (2017). Psychosocial factors associated with talent development in football: A systematic review. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 31, 93–112. doi:10.1016/j.psychsport.2017.04.002

**Concerns around balancing positive and negative subjective (e.g., psychological, social) and functional (e.g., educational) outcomes.**

Rongen F., Mckenna J, Cobley, S & Till, K (2018), Are youth sport talent identification and development systems necessary and healthy *Sport Medicine*, 4, doi.org/10.1186/s40798-018-0135-2.





# Challenges to coaches and other stakeholders

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**Low productivity of academies** Less than 1% of players who are contracted to professional football clubs aged 16 will still be playing the game aged 23.

**We know little about player perceptions of their TDEs**  
With this regard, their voice underrepresented.

**Aim** To explore England based academy soccer player perceptions of their talent development environments.



# Materials and procedure

Factor	Descriptions
1. Long-term development	The extent to which developmental programmes are specifically designed to facilitate athletes' long-term success (e.g., fundamental training and rounded development, ongoing opportunities, and de-emphasis of winning).
2. Holistic quality preparation	The extent to which intervention programmes are prepared both inside and outside of sports settings (e.g., caring coach, clear guidance, mental preparation, and balanced life).
3. Support network	The extent to which a coherent, approachable, and wide-ranging support network is available for the athlete in all areas (e.g., professionals, parents, coaches, and schools).
4. Communication	The extent to which the coach communicates effectively with the athlete in both formal and informal settings (e.g., development path, rationale for training, and feedback).
5. Alignment of expectations	The extent to which goals for sport development are coherently set and aligned (e.g., goal setting, goal review, and individualised goals).

Source: Adapted from Martindale (2010). Copyright 2010 by the Taylor & Francis Group.

## Talent Development Environment Questionnaire-5 (TDEQ-5)

Chunxiao Li, Chee Keng John Wang, Do Young Pyun & Russell Martindale (2015) Further development of the talent development environment questionnaire for sport, *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 33:17, 1831-1843, doi: 10.1080/02640414.2015.1014828

Designed to identify good practice in TDEs. Various iterations of the TDEQ (used in football but now could be seen as obsolete).

25 item, 5 Subscales. Deemed to be valid and reliable.

Likert scale 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree)

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Martindale, R. J. J., Collins, D., Wang, C. K. J., McNeill, M., Lee, K. S., Sproule, J., & Westbury, T. (2010). Development of the talent development environment questionnaire for sport. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 28, 1209–1221.



# Materials and Procedure

A total of 90 ( $N = 90$ ) elite youth soccer players completed the TDEQ-5.

Mean age ( $M_{age} = 17.8$ ,  $s = 0.5$  years). The sample consisted of players from CAT2 ( $n = 15$ ), CAT3 ( $n = 56$ ) and CAT4 ( $n = 19$ ) soccer academies aligned to professional soccer clubs.

5 Clubs in total (4 northern, 1 southern)

Completed in season, in person or via google forms.



		Number of items		
Subs				S
Long term develop				0.68
Support network				0.77
Alignment of Exp				0.85
Communication				1.03
Holistic quality prep			3.57	0.89

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1. Long-term development	The extent to which developmental programmes are specifically designed to facilitate athletes' long-term success (e.g., fundamental training and rounded development, ongoing opportunities, and de-emphasis of winning).
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# Results (Item level analysis)

1. My training is specifically designed to help me develop effectively in the long term. (LTD1)	Long Term Development	5.14	0.79
23. I can pop in to see my coach or other support staff whenever I need to (e.g. physiotherapist, psychologist, strength trainer, nutritionist, lifestyle advisor). (SN2)	Support Network	4.98	1.07
4. My coach allows me to learn through making my own mistakes. (LTD4)		4.94	0.90
3. I spend most of my time developing skills and attributes that my coach tells me I will need if I am to compete successfully at the top/professional level. (LTD3)		4.91	0.87
22. Currently, I have access to a variety of different types of professionals to help my sports development (e.g. physiotherapist, sport psychologist, strength trainer, nutritionist, lifestyle advisor). (SN1)		4.76	1.30
17. My coach rarely takes the time to talk to other coaches who work with me. (RHQP3)	Holistic Quality Prep	3.77	1.49
15. My coach rarely talks to me about my well-being. (RHQP1)		3.59	1.31
21. I am not taught that much about how to balance training, competing, and recovery. (RHQP7)		3.57	1.53
16. My coach doesn't appear to be that interested in my life outside of sport. (RHQP2)		3.47	1.22
18. I don't get much help to develop my mental toughness in sport effectively. (HHQP4)		2.7	1.18



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18. I don't get much help to develop my mental toughness in sport effectively (HHQP4)

approval, we examined elite youth football academy players in their progression to the professional level. With institutionalisation, the Talent Development Environment Questionnaire (TDEQ) (1) was used to survey 50 elite players aged 16-18 (m 17.1, s = 0.6 years) recruited from the academies of Premier League and Championship clubs in England. Overall, the results suggest that elite player development environments are perceived to be of a good quality. However, while academies appeared strong in areas related to coaching, organisation, and sport-related support; they were somewhat deficient in areas related to athlete understanding, links to senior progression, and key stakeholder relationships. In addition to the importance of establishing well-integrated youth and senior teams and positive working relationships with stakeholders, findings underline the necessity for academies to pay close attention to psychosocial environments they create for developing players with considerations and applied implications for the development of elite player development are discussed.

**Key words:** Talent development, elite player development, youth football academy, progression to the professional level, institutionalisation, Premier League, Championship, England, UK.

# Implications for Coaches and other stakeholders

Scope for education for coaches and wider stakeholders (parents, players, all support staff) in the form of workshops surrounding coach-athlete relationships and also holistic preparation. *Similar practice has been show to work within psychological skills*

Harwood C, Barker, J.B., Anderson, R. (2015). Psychosocial Development in Youth Soccer Players: Assessing the Effectiveness of the 5Cs Intervention Program. *The Sport Psychologist*, 2015, 29, 319 - 334 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1123/tsp.2014-0161>

Individual club stakeholders such as Academy Managers or Director of Football could use the TDEQ-5 to self assess against TDEQ-5 subscales as part of existing evaluative processes.





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**Thank you**



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